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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000016

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SUBJECT: TUSK VISIT TO PRAGUE: NO CHANGE IN CZECH POSITION

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mike Dodman for reasons 1.4
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¶1. (C/NF) Summary: The January 10 meeting of the Czech and Polish PMs appears not to have resulted in any significant change in the Czech approach to missile defense (MD) negotiations. PM Topolanek stated during a joint press conference with Tusk that the Czech side still intends to conclude negotiations in the coming months and submit the agreements to Parliament after the April NATO Summit. However, Topolanek's statements also offered some concessions to Tusk, including a statement that "quality" of the agreements "is more important than speed," and that the Czech timeline could be slowed down by "external influences," which he said include simply Czech negotiating requests not being met. Czech officials tell us the meeting resulted in no change in their planned negotiating timeline, which will be debated and confirmed at a meeting of the Czech National Security Council on January 17. However, they have also said they will likely need to delay ratification if the Polish agreements are not concluded. End summary.

¶2. (C/NF) Topolanek and his senior team have been talking about the visit of new Polish PM Donald Tusk to Prague ever since the two met on the margins of a Visegrad-4 meeting last month. Topolanek, as head of the center-right ODS Party, clearly feels an affinity with Tusk and his party and was anxious to establish closer relations than he had with the Kaczynski-led government. While the agenda for the talks included EU relations and Kosovo, MD was always going to be the lead item, particularly in light of the steady stream of public comments from Tusk and his cabinet on MD during recent days. Tusk met with President Klaus and the speakers of both chambers of Parliament during his time in Prague, but the main event was the meeting with Topolanek, much of which was one-on-one. We spoke with Veronika Kuchynova-Smigolova on January 11; she had spoken with Deputy ForMin Pojar, who spoke with PM Topolanek following the meeting. Kuchynova told us the GOCR was very pleased with the meetings, and that she and Pojar (the government's main MD strategists) see no change in Czech position as a result of the visit.

¶3. (C/NF) The expectation for the meeting was that Topolanek would try to convince the Poles to accelerate their MD negotiations, explaining that (a) Czech political realities (a divided parliament, strong negatives for MD, and local elections in the fall) call for ratification in the first half of 2008, and ideally soon after the Bucharest NATO Summit in April, which the Czechs hope will include an endorsement of the U.S. MD project in Europe, and (b) these same political realities require that the Polish half of the third site be a firm "go" before the Czechs move to ratify. Czech officials had told us that Topolanek was planning to offer Tusk some specific proposals (not identified) to try to get Tusk to agree to speed up negotiations. For their part, the Czechs expected Tusk to try to convince the Czechs to

slow down their negotiations and to seek from the USG some of the same things the Poles are seeking, namely enhanced security guarantees.

14. (C/NF) Based on their public comments, neither side moved much, although Tusk appears to have been somewhat more successful. Topolanek said for the first time in public what his government has been planning for some time, namely that the GOCR expects to be able to submit signed agreements to Parliament in April, following the NATO Summit; Tusk made clear that he will neither accelerate nor slow down talks, and repeated the demands he has made in recent days. Tusk did stress that the timing of U.S.-Polish negotiations has nothing to do with the change of administration in Washington, indicating the GOP is not intending to wait for the new administration. However, Miroslav Vlcek, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and representative of the opposition CSSD, claimed after his meeting that Tusk agreed with his proposition that neither country should ratify the agreements until after the U.S. elections. While Topolanek did specify the April target, he also added that caveat that "external influences" could delay the submission to Parliament. And specifically one such "influence" would be the Czech failure to win enough of their negotiating demands. Topolanek also supported his guest by stating that "quality is more important than speed." Both said that the two governments share the same views on MD, and that they intend to coordinate their negotiations with Washington (the latter sentiment has been voiced repeatedly following Czech-Polish meetings over the past year).

15. (C/NF) Kuchynova-Smigolova told us the meetings unfolded essentially as predicted. The Czech side made clear the domestic imperative of moving forward quickly, the Polish

PRAGUE 00000016 002 OF 002

side made clear they are in no hurry (with Tusk pointing out he has a full four-year mandate in front of him), and neither side convincing the other of the need to move from their current posture. Kuchynova-Smigolova said the Czechs were pleased to hear Tusk say clearly that he supports the MD project and wants it to go forward. Pojar had told us on January 7, when Tusk government officials had begun to speak loudly about their readiness to go slow with negotiations, that the current government thinking is that (a) the Czechs will proceed with negotiations planned for late this month and still want to conclude both agreements in early 2008, but (b) politically it would be impossible to get parliamentary ratification before the Polish agreements were at least signed, and therefore the GOCR would have no choice but to let their signed agreements sit until the Polish negotiations were concluded. This strategy, and the question of how Topolanek's February 27 White House meeting will play into it, will be debated at the January 17 Czech National Security Council meeting, which will also review the state of negotiations and give the two negotiating teams new mandates in advance of the two rounds of negotiations scheduled for late January. (Note that MDA Director Obering will participate in the opening session of the NSC meeting on January 17.)

16. (C/NF) In terms of next steps regarding Poland, Kuchynova-Smigolova said much depends on the timing of visits to Washington by Polish FM Sikorski and PM Tusk. The Czechs expect the Poles to agree to relaunch talks on the BMD Agreement in early February, i.e., after a likely late-January Sikorski visit to Washington. But she admits that this step may have to wait until after a Tusk visit. She related that the GOP is expecting an invitation for a White House meeting for Tusk in late February/early March, but added that Warsaw would also like to see a Tusk-Bush meeting before Tusk travels to Moscow to see President Putin on February 8. The Czechs and Poles agreed to meet again at the senior level in March, after Topolanek's (and presumably Tusk's) visit to Washington.

¶7. (C/NF) Comment: Press commentaries this morning assess that the Poles had the upper hand in the bilateral meeting, and that the Czechs have in some sense agreed to a delay. While political realities may in the end require the Czechs to delay ratification, we do not expect that the January 17 Czech NSC meeting will result in any significant shift in the Czech approach to negotiations. In other words, we do not believe the Czechs will slow down the pace of talks, nor are they likely to add any new demands for security guarantees. That said, the Czechs are likely to come out of the NSC meeting with a more strident position on the issues that are important to them. Specifically, with an increased likelihood that the optimal scenario for ratification may not hold, the Czechs are likely to continue to press firmly on politically sensitive issues in the negotiations, including limiting the scope of the SOFA. They will also likely reinforce the importance of demonstrating tangible economic benefits as a result of MD (Czech officials have told us they see economic benefits as more important to their country in the long run than specific security guarantees), and establishing a credible bilateral "strategic dialogue."

Thompson-Jones